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## Governor optimistic about state's economy

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HILO -- Within days of her return from the Republican National Convention, Gov. Linda Lingle was in Hilo Wednesday as boastful about the state's economic upswing as she was in New York City.

For Hawaii's prosperity in tourism and construction, Lingle credited administrative policy changes encouraging a pro-business mindset, along with low interest rates, the economies of both Japan and the U.S. mainland, and the military's anticipated Stryker Brigade construction projects on Oahu and at the Pohakuloa Training Area on this island.

Lingle shared her optimism for Hawaii's future with Hilo Rotarians gathered for a luncheon at the Naniloa Hotel, saying it will be "hard to beat this year's," but the state's economy is projected to be even better next year.



She said Hawaii joins Nevada in being chosen to set up office space in Beijing to help prepare for the 2008 Olympics.

She noted Hawaii will have an opportunity to set up trade with China but also environmental planners and "people in hospitality" here might find construction jobs as the Chinese prepare for the games.

Lingle added that the University of Hawaii has established a relationship with the University of China.

Lingle said "all numbers are up" here, from visitors to government spending, and listed the Hilo Judicial complex along with other state construction projects either being planned or complete at the Hilo International Airport, Hilo Harbor, Keaukaha and E.B. de Silva Elementary Schools and Keaau Middle School.

She credited Hilo area businesses who "got smaller, worked harder, and didn't give up" along with the "new attitude in government" introduced by her administration for the turnaround in the local economy.

Statewide, Lingle said it is not enough to create jobs; workforce development is also needed.

People can't pass basic math for apprenticeships to be a plumber or a carpenter with only high school diplomas in Hawaii, she said.

"I'm going to push this session for a mandate that 90 cents of the dollar in the state go to the school level and bypass bureaucracy," said Lingle.

The governor said she would present a six-year balanced budget to the state Council on Revenues today, and anticipated legislators will note revenues are up and want to hastily spend the money.

Lingle advocated a "new business model for politics in our state," namely to speed up the state's mode of operation and elect legislators who "agree with us."

Asked about the Hokulia issue, she had a vague response, pointing out people generally want to rely upon government as "the last discretionary approval."

"When government can't be trusted, it impacts the view of government, particularly from investors. We need to make sure this thing doesn't happen again," Lingle said.

She acknowledged it is the state's responsibility under the 1978 constitutional amendment to identify and protect important agricultural lands.

However, she said historically in Hawaii the agricultural category has been "a default category" where "anything not urban or conservation went in ag."

Citing the 25 years since the state acted on its mandate to develop policies for identifying and protecting important agricultural lands, Lingle said, "The speed with which we move is too slow."

She said the state has "caved into financial interests, rather than looking at financial interests long term," which would be to distinguish important agricultural lands.

While Lingle said it is the state's responsibility to identify and protect important ag lands, she said she advocates of "home rule" and "if the county wants to take the initiative and designate, it should."

Asked about traffic, the governor said Department of Transportation needs to ensure its road planning is in line with residents' needs.

She also blamed a Legislature that over the years has "raided" the highway fund used to maintain roads and address traffic issues in order to balance the budget.

"They pretend to balance the budget to pay for salary increases and debt service," Lingle said.

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